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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement^{*} submitted by the Verein Sudwind Entwicklungspolitik, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[16 February 2015]

^{*} This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Environmental crisis in Islamic Republic of Iran

The report of the Independent Expert on the issue of the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a human right emphasizes on the obligations of the state relating to the environment and includes descriptions of specific good practices.

However, despite these good practices some regions are showing almost no improvement. In the Islamic Republic of Iran thousands of people are facing serious health hazards from air pollution, diminished water resources, dust storms, accelerated deforestation and desertification. The crisis is partly the result of local mismanagement of the Islamic Republic of Iran and partly by Iran's neighboring countries.

The environmental as the recent reports indicate is severe. In the cities of Ahwaz and Mahshahr in Khuzestan province, on January 31, 2015 the air pollution reached over 5000 micrograms per cubic meter. Around the noon in Mahshahr 10000 microgram per cubic meter was measured. Particle pollution of PM10 over 435 microgram per cubic meter is scaled as hazardous. The Authorities ordered the closure of schools and advised businesses to reduce their hours after toxic smog covered the city. "The city was covered in dust," the Iranian Students News Agency (ISNA) reported^[1]. Iranians tweeted pictures of buildings and streets covered with dust with the hashtag #Khuzestancantbreathe

On the event's Facebook page, residents of several cities around the country have published photos of rallies against environmental hazards. Even before these recent nationwide demonstrations, over the last few months, other gatherings had been organized in some cities such as Zanjan, Arak and Shazand all against air pollution, a serious health issue that affects all Iranians.

On Feb. 8, 2015, Nasser Sudani, a memberparliament from Ahvaz, complained that:"instead of breathing air, the people in Khouzeestan are breathing dust."^[2] He blamed the officials in the administration for not offering a solution to the crisis, saying, "The health of millions in Khouzeestan is in danger but we see no action from the administration." He warned that if a solution is not presented, those living in Khouzeestan will face difficulties.

Iran's critical water crisis is another mark of environmental conditions. Iran is currently the third biggest dam builder in the world, with consequent overuse of fossil groundwater sources, drying of its major rivers, and destruction of wetlands. Lake and rivers are drying out. Lake Urmia, once the largest salt lake in the Middle East, is nearly vanished. Wetlands are drying one after another and water quality is degrading in some populous areas.^[3] As a result the Islamic Republic of Iran is experiencing more frequent dust storms. These are extremely unpleasant, to agriculture and livestock, decrease the quality of life of inhabitants, and eventually force out-migration.

The shrinking of surface water sources has encouraged aggressive extraction of non-renewable groundwater resources, making Iran one of the world's top groundwater miners, with declining groundwater levels causing major subsidence in some areas. Some estimates suggest 70% of Iran's groundwater resources have been used and that groundwater shortage and quality will be the next national environmental disaster that Iranians will face. Parliament member Ismael Jalili from Masjed Soleyman blamed the Energy Ministry for its poor management of the wetland, rivers and springs in the province.

Tehran's 8.3 million residents inhaled a deadly mix of rubber particles, asbestos, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, carbon monoxide, and partially unburnt hydrocarbons for more than six months out of the year. Cancer and respiratory illnesses - the second and third highest causes of death in Iran - are on the rise. Nearly 70,000 people are diagnosed with cancer each year, a number that is likely to increase by 90% by 2020, according to the Cancer Research Centre of Iran.^[4]

Tehran has cleaned up recently, with carbon monoxide levels no longer a problem, lead eliminated from gasoline, and sulphur levels dropping from a frightening 8000 parts per million (ppm) to less than 200 ppm (they are aiming at <10). But a third of days in Tehran are still officially "unhealthy." It's worse for the vulnerable and schools are often closed.

Tehran Mayor Mohammad BagherGhalibaf, "Today our main problem is the environment, and we cannot say that the environment is endangering people's lives. We must say that the environment is taking people's lives." Ghalibaf said,

"You might say there is a problem with the budget or the law, but in my opinion these are preliminary problems and we have not even been able to use the budget in the legal capacities that we have." [5]

Tehran is no stranger to shut-downs over pollution, usually due to smog. On June 2, 2014, a major sand storm hit Tehran, temporarily closing down the city. According to one Tehran-based environmentalist, "Air pollution is reaching a point where it is noticeable as a social or political demand. If people were crying 'where is my vote' in 2009, their demand in 2014 was, 'where is my breathable air?'"

Environmental rights as human rights require a commitment to other basic rights: access to information, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, right to health and right to a remedy. But the I.R.I. is suppressing all voices against environmental pollution. One example is Mr. Ribwar Kamranipour, an environmental activist and member of Sabzchiya Association who was summoned by Intelligence Service office of Sanandaj on 10 Dec 2014 and no authority takes responsibility for his detention, and there is no news of him.

Recommendation to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran:

- 1) Increasing environmental laws in terms of quality and quantity for providing limitations against destructive environmental activities and overuse of natural resources and applying changes to them.
- 2) Increasing attention to the relationship between the environment and sustainable development (clean development) as well as International supervision regarding the indicators of sustainable development.
- 3) Evaluation of all construction plans for their environmental impact before they are implemented.
- 4) Environmental NGOs and activists should be allowed to discuss and supervise the implementation of government and private construction plans without being threatened with prison.
- 5) Regarding air pollution, measures need to be taken which include the allocation of resources to implement the findings of scientific studies on fine particles and dust storms and also educational work to raise people's environmental awareness by way of mass media while providing the population with adequate safety measures and medical facilities.
- 6) The development, advancement and optimization of meteorological systems in situ and satellites to simulate dust progress and issue warnings. Also, the prediction of the effects of environmental phenomena related to dust storms and the elaboration of strategies to deal with these storms through collaboration with research centers and international institutions.

[1] khuzestan.isna.ir/Default.aspx?NSID=5&SSLID=46&NID=58095

[2] www.icana.ir/Fa/News/271974

[3] <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs13412-014-0182-z>

[4] <http://www.presstv.com/detail/2014/02/08/349747/cancer-rising-wave-striking-iranians/>

[5] <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13921016001130>